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Health Reform Column:

Health reform in Kansas - An Investment in our future

The following is a column by Rob Kaplan, Professor of Management Practice at the Harvard Business School and Board member of the Kansas Health Policy Authority. Kaplan argues that investing in health reform will help improve health and health care, increase access to care, and decrease long-term costs for the state of Kansas.

Successful business people often choose to make upfront investments in their enterprises in order to generate substantial long term benefits. In this same way, health reform in Kansas represents an upfront investment that will yield substantial future benefits to the state of Kansas and its citizens. The package of health reform proposals presented to the legislature on November 1 by the Kansas Health Policy Authority (KHPA) will improve access to health services and coordination of care delivered, reduce preventable health ailments, and improve the overall health of Kansans. These recommendations, if enacted, would be supplemented by millions of Federal matching dollars to our state.

Kansas will benefit greatly from implementing the KHPA proposals. The recommended reform plan for Kansas is expected to reduce the number of uninsured citizens by 86,000. It also focuses on promoting personal responsibility and disease prevention through a number of common sense proposals. These proposals should result in healthier Kansans and will mean that, in the long-run, rising health care costs will be better controlled and Kansans should experience an improved quality of living. This plan will specifically target smoking and obesity, two of the most significant contributing factors to early death and excessive health care costs in the state.

The current health care system in Kansas needs reform. Based on published statistics, the health and health care system in Kansas is not improving and, in many respects, is in fact worsening versus the rest of the nation. In a 2007 national ranking of overall health, Kansas dropped six positions to 23rd -- versus a ranking of 17th nationally in 2006. The prevalence of smoking was estimated to have risen by 12%, obesity by 8%, and the number of uninsured increased by 19%. These disturbing trends have significant negative implications for health care costs and quality of living in Kansas.

Kansas has a historic opportunity to enact reform that offers substantial short and long-term benefits. Inaction will likely result in continuing increases in the number of uninsured Kansans and a progressive worsening in our overall health. Unless we act, the amount of preventable health costs will continue to rise and we will miss a significant opportunity to start saving money on our long-term health care bill. The future of health and health care in Kansas depends on us investing money now in order to reap substantial benefits in the years to come.

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The Health Policy Authority is a state agency created to develop and maintain a coordinated and data-driven health policy agenda, and it was tasked this year with reforming health care delivery in Kansas. On November 1, 2007, the KHPA Board reported to the Governor and the Kansas Legislature on health reform options aimed at improving the health and health care system in Kansas.

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